Evaluating Objections to Carl F. H. Henry's Cognitive-Propositional Hermeneutic

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Introduction[2]

Having presented an overview of Henry's analysis of epistemology, language, and hermeneutics;[3] the following article will focus on two negative responses to Carl F. H. Henry's "cognitive-propositionalist" hermeneutic.[4] In

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[2] It should be noted that Henry follows the two fold method of (1) Hermeneutics as epistemology and (2) Hermeneutics as methodology. Henry's cognitive-propositionalism is an example of his hermeneutic as epistemology, whereas the grammatical-historical method is an example of his hermeneutic as methodology. The cognitive-propositional hermeneutic describes Henry's view of epistemology *per se* and the relationship between epistemology and language.

[3] See William C. Roach, *Hermeneutics as Epistemology: A Critical Evaluation of Carl F. H. Henry's Epistemological Approach to Hermeneueutics* (Wipf and Stock: Forthcoming).

[4] This article is only going to discuss Henry's hermeneutic as epistemology. The reason it will only discuss Henry's hermeneutic is because the purpose of this book is to explore Henry's epistemology *per se* and his hermeneutic as epistemology. It also discusses his hermeneutics as methodology; however, it is assumed that if Henry's hermeneutics as epistemology is flawed, then his hermeneutic as methodology is flawed too. Second, it is because most of the criticisms

particular, it will investigate and respond to claims made by

Stanley Grenz, John Franke, and Alister McGrath, that

Henry's epistemology *per se* is a form of rationalism or

foundationalism.[5] All three of these scholars critique

Henry's view of propositional revelation too. However,

Kevin Vanhoozer offers a new critique of Henry's view of

cognitive-propositional revelation, and for that reason, his

criticisms will be explained in the section titled "cognitive-

propositionalism."[6] This article will: (1) Present Grenz,

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are leveled against Henry's cognitive-propositionalism, not his use of the grammatical-historical method.

[5] These scholars like Robert Webber use the terms "rationalism" and "foundationalism" interchangeably. In his book, *The Younger Evangelicals*, Webber traces the historical background of foundationalism to Enlightenment foundationalism. He believes that Henry's epistemology is derived from rationalism and a result of foundationalism (again, terms he uses interchangeably). Webber believes that Henry's cognitive-propositional method illustrates the rationalist method best. He suggests that Henry's insistence on a literal interpretation of Scripture is an overflow of his epistemology and view of propositional revelation. Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 94–98.

[6] The reason this section will only investigate the claims that Henry is a modernist and/or rationalist and his view of propositional revelation is because those are the two most pertinent critiques of his view. Others such as R. C. Sproul and John Gerstner have charged Henry with being a fideist; however, this claim applies to his overall

Franke, McGrath, and Vanhoozer's charges against Henry's epistemology and cognitive-propositionalism; and (2) It will attempt to analyze and refute the charges that Henry's epistemology *per se* and cognitive-propositionalism is a form of rationalism or foundationalism.

Epistemology *Per Se*

The first criticism presented against Henry's method comes from postmodern theologians Stanley Grenz and John Franke. Not only do they use postmodernism to criticize Henry's epistemology *per se*, Grenz and Franke also use it to criticize his hermeneutic as epistemology and methodology too. In their book titled, *Beyond*

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apologetic methodology not his hermeneutic as epistemology or methodology. Furthermore, some charge Henry with not being modern enough for not endorsing contemporary forms of biblical exegesis. Many of these critiques label Henry as a modernist who works out that method into his overall hermeneutic approach. However, this is merely another way of labeling Henry as a rationalist.

Foundationalism, Grenz and Franke label Henry as a

foundationalist.[7] They claim,

> In the mid-twentieth century, the classic
> Protestant scholastic approach to theology
> found an able advocate in the renowned
> evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry.
> Henry asserts that the sole foundation of
> theology rests on the presupposition that the
> bible [sic], as the self-disclosure of God, is
> entirely truthful in propositional form.
> Therefore, the task of theology is simply 'to
> exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an
> orderly whole.'[8]

According to Grenz and Franke, Henry's method is in the

scholastic theological tradition that understands the Bible

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[7] Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 7, 14, 61. The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* defines foundationalism as, "The view in epistemology that knowledge must be regarded as a structure raised upon secure, certain foundations. These are found in some combinations of experience and reason, with different schools (empiricism, rationalism) emphasizing the role of one over the other. Foundationalism was associated with the ancient Stoics, and in the modern era with Descartes, who discovered his foundationalism in the 'clear and distinct' ideas of reason." See Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994),145

[8] Ibid., 14.

primarily as rational and cognitive- propositional

revelation.[9] They claim A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield

are the historic advocates of this rational view of Scripture.

Grenz and Franke believe the scholastic approach views the

Bible as primarily a storehouse of theological facts with a

collection of true statements. Unsurprisingly, Grenz and

Franke believe Henry's approach is a recapitulation and a

throwback to pre-Enlightenment epistemology and

theology. They claim that the hermeneutical methods of

scholastic theologians, the Princetonians, and Henry are

ultimately based on rationalist epistemologies.[10]

The second criticism against Henry's method comes

from Alister McGrath, who affirms a critical-realist

epistemology and believes Henry's methodology (e.g.,

epistemology *per se*, hermeneutic as epistemology,

apologetic methodology and so forth) has been influenced

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[9] Ibid., 61.
[10] Ibid.

by rationalism.[11] McGrath also believes that Henry and

other American evangelicals, such as John Warwick

Montgomery, Francis Schaeffer and Norman Geisler, have

been influenced by Princetonian rationalism were

continuing the epistemological preconceptions of

rationalistic philosophy.[12] McGrath claims Henry is the

main representative of this trend. He writes,

> Thus even Carl Henry can offer such
> hostages to fortune as his affirmation of
> belief in a 'logically consistent divine
> revelation.' In the end, Henry risks making an
> implicit appeal to a more fundamental
> epistemological foundation in his affirmation
> of the authority of Scripture, leading to the
> conclusion that the authority of Scripture
> itself is derived from a more fundamental

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[11] Alister McGrath, *A Passion For Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 106. He traces the rationalistic spirit in American evangelicalism through the Princetonian use of "Scottish-realism" or "Common-sense philosophy." The effect has been that American evangelicalism has responded to theologies like neo-orthodoxy and created an apologetic that stresses the informational content of revelation. Ibid., 106. McGrath claims, "The result is that forms of American evangelicalism which have been especially influenced by rationalism, such as that associated with Carl Henry, have laid too much emphasis upon the notion of a purely propositional biblical revelation." Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 170.

authority. Thus for Henry, 'without noncontradiction and logical consistency, no knowledge whatever is possible.'[13]

McGrath believes the danger of Henry's approach is it reduces Scripture to a type of "code book." It makes the truth of divine revelation dependent on fallen human reason. McGrath claims that evangelicalism cannot allow revelation to be imprisoned by fallen reason. It cannot allow the extra-biblical use of evangelical rationalism to validate or judge the Scriptural witness.[14] McGrath attempts to trace the effects of this type of rationalist approach back to the early church. He believes that Tertullian pointed out the danger of this rational method.[15]

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] McGrath uses the Christological debates to illustrate his point. He claims, "Those criticisms that the incarnation is illogical] were intensified at the time of the Enlightenment, with many critics of traditional Christianity following Spinoza in declaring that talk of Jesus as being both God and man made about as much logical sense as talking about a square circle. Henry renders evangelicalism intensely– and needlessly–vulnerable at this point. Indeed, some evangelicals have even developed 'one-nature' Christologies in response to the rationalist pressure, here endorsed by Henry, to conform to 'logic', despite the

It seems like McGrath is trying to claim that Henry's use of rationalist ideals renders evangelicalism to affirm heretical positions in order to preserve "logic." This is said in such a way so as to convey the idea that "logic is the supreme authority over divine revelation."[16] However, as will be seen later; McGrath, much like Kevin Vanhoozer, seems to be misreading Henry and possibly reading him in the worst possible light.[17]

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seriously unorthodoxy consequences of this move. Yet why should evangelicals feel under any such pressure to conform to the highly questionable dictates of fallen human reason? And how often has it been pointed out, even by secular philosophers, that 'logic is the enemy of truth'?" Ibid., 171.

[16] However, what is McGrath's response to the notion of logical consistency and divine revelation? McGrath claims, "If divine revelation appears to be logically inconsistent on occasion (as it undoubtedly does: witness the doctrine of the two natures of Christ), this cannot be taken to mean that the doctrine in question is wrong, or that the doctrine is not divine revelation on account of its 'illogical' character. Rather, this merely illustrates the fact that fallen human reason cannot fully comprehend the majesty of God. This point was made regularly by Christian writers as diverse as Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin." Ibid.

[17] Gregory Alan Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 107.

"Evangelicalism," according to McGrath, "if it were to follow Henry's lead at this juncture, would set itself on the road that inevitably allows fallen human reason to judge God's revelation, or become its ultimate foundation."[18] McGrath believes evangelicalism cannot go down this road, even if it did at one point and time offer a short-term apologetic advantage within the culture of the Enlightenment worldview. He goes on to say, "Today, evangelicalism is free to avoid the false lure of foundationalism, and to maintain the integrity of divine revelation on its own terms and in its own categories. Let Scripture be Scripture!"[19] McGrath returns to Henry, suggesting he has fallen prey to the rationalist ideals characteristic of the Enlightenment. He writes,

> The theological style adopted by Henry also gives the impression of preferring to deal with general principles or 'objective facts' (a characteristic Enlightenment notion) rather

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[18] McGrath, *A Passion For Truth*, 171.
[19] Ibid., 172.

than with the historical narrative of revelation. Henry insists, in true Enlightenment fashion, that each and every aspect of the Bible may be reduced to first principles or logical axioms. 'Regardless of the parables, allegories, emotive phrases and rhetorical questions used by these [biblical] writers, their literary devices have a logical point which can be propositionally formulated and is objectively true or false.' Henry adopts an approach which Hans Frei discerned as characteristic of rationalism: the extraction of logical propositional statements from an essentially narrative piece of writing.[20]

McGrath seems to propose that Henry's hermeneutic as epistemology has been taken hostage by Enlightenment philosophy. In turn, his doctrine of divine propositional revelation and hermeneutics as methodology are the logical extensions of these rationalistic ideals.[21]

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

Cognitive-Propositionalism

Kevin Vanhoozer, another generally speaking critical-realist, concurs with the claim that Henry affirms the Enlightenment philosophy of A. A. Hodge. In his address to the Evangelical Theological Society, Vanhoozer wrote an article titled, "Lost In Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics."[22] In that article, he includes a section titled, "'*Mining the deposit of truth': The Hodge-Henry hypothesis*."[23] In his book titled, *The Drama of Doctrine,* Vanhoozer claims that Henry's type of cognitive-

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[22] Kevin Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation: Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *JETS* 48, no. 1 (2005): 89–114. Vanhoozer claims, "In the big geopolitical picture, postliberals and evangelicals are allies: postliberals are generously orthodox, trinitarian, and Christocentric. But they are not so sure about us. Hans Frei, for example, worries that Carl Henry is a closet *modernist* because of his commitment to truth as historical factuality. For Frei, it is the biblical narrative itself, not its propositional paraphrase, that is the truth-bearer. Whereas for Henry doctrines state the meaning of the narratives, for Frei we only understand the doctrine by understanding the story. Emergent evangelicals have similar questions about their conservative counterparts. Raschke, for example, says, 'Inerrantism amounts to the rehellenizing of the faith and a retreat from the Reformation.'" Ibid., 99–100.

[23] Ibid., 94, Italics in original.

propositionalism characterizes not only Aquinas, but also

the scholastic tradition, the Princetonians, and older forms

of evangelicalism (e.g., what Thornbury labels as "classic

evangelicalism").[24] He goes on to note,

> Carl F. H. Henry's magisterial defense of
> propositional revelation follows in the same
> tradition. He defines a proposition as 'a
> verbal statement that is either true or false.'
> The Scripture, says Henry, contain a divinely
> given body of information actually expressed
> or capable of being expressed in propositions.
> Those parts of the Bible that are not already
> in the form of statements may be paraphrased
> in propositional form. In Henry's words:
> 'Christian theology is the systematization of
> the truth-content explicit and implicit in the
> inspired writings.' In what we may call the
> Hodge-Henry (H-H) hypothesis, doctrine is
> the result of biblical induction and deduction,
> a capsule summary of the meaning of
> Scripture 'taken as a set of propositional
> statements, each expressing a divine
> affirmation, valid always and everywhere.'
> Propositionalist theology tends to see
> Scripture in terms of revelation, revelation in
> terms of conveying information, and

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[24] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 267.

theology in terms of divine information-processing.[25]

Vanhoozer represents the H-H hypothesis as a view that portrays language as a "*Correspondence as a picture relation.*"[26] That term means the H-H hypothesis is primarily concerned with stating truth, which in turn is a function of describing and representing the world.[27] He critiques the H-H view of language for its similarities to Wittgenstein's picture theory of language. Vanhoozer believes both approaches fail to account for the ways people *use* language, and finally ". . . in seeking propositional restatements of Scripture it [cognitive-propositionalism] implies that there is something inadequate about the Bible's own forms of language and

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[25] Vanhoozer, "Lost In Interpretation," 95.

[26] Ibid, Italics in original.

[27] Ibid. Vanhoozer claims, "Meaning here becomes largely a matter of ostensive reference, a matter of indicating objects or statements of affairs. The biblical text is a mirror of nature, history, and even eternity to the extent that I can state universal truths about God's being." Ibid.

literature."[28] Vanhoozer calls for evangelicalism to move

beyond this type of "molecular hermeneutics."[29] He claims

that *texts* are not simply bundles of propositions, but new

kinds of entities with emergent properties.[30] Vanhoozer's

main problem with the H-H hypothesis and the picture

theory of meaning is it seems inadequate for *textual*

meaning.[31]

Vanhoozer suggests Henry claims that those parts

of the Bible that are not already in propositional statements,

may be summarized in propositional form.[32] He praises

Henry for desiring to stress the cognitive content of

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[28] Ibid., 96.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Vanhoozer claims in the corresponding footnote, "Henry comes close to what literary critics call the 'heresy of propositional paraphrase' when he suggests that the truth expressed in literary forms such as poetry and parable may be expressed in 'declarative propositions' (*God, Revelation & Authority*, 3.463). Even speech acts such as promising and commanding can be 'translated into propositions' (p. 477). Such paraphrases and translations are necessary because 'the primary concern of revelation is the communication of truth' (p. 477)." Ibid., 95, fn. 21.

Scripture; however, Vanhoozer believes his insistence on

the complete propositional nature of special revelation does

not do justice to the Bible's various genres. Vanhoozer

agrees with the claim that Henry advocates a version of the

"heresy of propositional paraphrase."[33] He suggests Henry

preserved the propositional nature of revelation due to a

fear that theologians might utilize theories of interpretation

to "neutralize" inerrancy.[34]

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[34] Ibid., 97. Vanhoozer claims, "The Lausanne Covenant (1974) and the Chicago Statement (1978) use similar formulations to define biblical inerrancy, the one saying the Bible is 'without error in all that it affirms,' the other that 'it is true and reliable in all matters it addresses' (Art. XI). Strictly speaking, however, 'it' neither affirms nor addresses; *authors* do. Interestingly, Carl Henry worries that too great a focus on authorial intention detracts from inerrancy, since 'some commentators seem to imply that the biblical writers need not always have intended to teach truth.' for example, does the author of Josh 9:13 intend his statement about the sun standing still to contradict a heliocentric world view? Was Melanchthon right to attack Copernicus

Vanhoozer believes the way forward for evangelicalism is not to retreat to propositionalist theology, but to find out the *kind* of truth the Bible has and *how* it speaks about truth.[35] Vanhoozer interacts with Henry at this point suggesting,

> Carl Henry was absolutely right to stress the cognitive content of Scripture and doctrine over against those who sought to make revelation a non-cognitive experience. Is it possible, however, that in so focusing on biblical *content* he, and other conservative evangelicals, have overlooked the significance of biblical literary *form*? We shall return to this point below. The immediate point is this: of all theological traditions, evangelicals must respect the nature of the biblical books they interpret. It is no service to the Bible to make a literary-category mistake. At least on this point, I agree with James Barr: 'Genre mistakes cause the *wrong kind of truth values* to be attached to the biblical sentences.' The dialogue between conservative and emergent evangelicals could be helped by a recognition

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for suggesting that it is the earth, not the sun, that moves?" Ibid., 106, Italics in original.

[35] Ibid., 100.

of the cognitive significance of Scripture's literary forms.[36]

In the end, Vanhoozer believes speech-act-theory offers evangelicals a more theologically robust and coherent corrective to the propositionalist theologies of Hodge and Henry.[37]

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[36] Ibid, Italics in original. Immediately following these remarks Vanhoozer claims, "To interpret the Bible truly, then, we must do more than string together individual propositions like beads on a string. This takes us only so far as fortune cookie theology, to a practice of breaking open Scripture in order to find the message contained within. What gets *lost* in propositionalist interpretation are the circumstances of the statement, its poetic and affective elements, and even, then, a dimension of its truth. We do less than justice to Scripture if we preach and teach only its propositional content. Information alone is insufficient for spiritual formation. We need to get beyond 'cheap inerrancy,' beyond ascribing accolades to the Bible to understanding what the Bible is actually saying, beyond professing biblical truth to *practicing* it." Ibid., Italics in original.

[37] Vanhoozer suggests that speech acts are able to understand better whether or not the authors intended their sentences to be assertive, factual, commanding, etc. Vanhoozer points out that Henry was leery of suggesting that the biblical authors did not always intend to teach truth. Ibid., 107. However, Vanhoozer suggests, "*The cognitive contribution of literary forms: the literary sense is the literal sense.*" Ibid., Italics in original. Vanhoozer interprets this statement to mean, "The Bible proposes things for our consideration not just via individual assertions but in 'many and diverse ways' that derive from its diverse literary forms (as well as from its diverse illocutionary forces, as we have just seen). The form of what Scripture says is not merely incidental to its truth." Ibid.

Vanhoozer labels himself as a "modified propositionalist."[38] He desires to recognize the cognitive significance not only of statements and propositions, but of *all* the Bible's figures of speech and literary forms.[39] Vanhoozer believes his approach resists the temptation to "dedramatize—to de-from" the biblical text in order to abstract a revealed truth.[40] He concludes by saying, "My approach to theology—call it 'postconservative'—does not deny the importance of cognitive content, but it does resist privileging a single form—the propositional statement—for expressing it."[41] Vanhoozer calls for a new understanding of biblical inerrancy, where the *literal* sense is understood to be the *literary* sense.[42] He distinguishes his view of inerrancy from the "cheap inerrancy" view of Henry and

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[38] Ibid. See chapter three of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* for Henry's response to Vanhoozer like approaches that attempt to diminish or deny the plenary cognitive status of divine revelation.

[39] Ibid., 107–108.

[40] Ibid., 108.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

the Chicago Statements on Biblical Inerrancy and

Hermeneutics.[43]

Analysis of Negative Responses

Now that Grenz, Franke, McGrath, and Vanhoozer, have

been able to level their charges against Henry's method, it

is time to evaluate their claims.[44] This second section will

respond to their charges by analyzing four areas of Henry's

epistemology and cognitive-propositionalist method: (1) It

will analyze different views on faith and reason to show

that Henry is not a rationalist; (2) It will: (a) analyze the

secondary sources that defend Henry against the claim that

he is a rationalist; (b) explore Henry's self-testimony that

he adheres to an Augustinian epistemology vs. a Cartesian

form of rationalism, and explain his criticisms of

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[43] Ibid., 108–109.
[44] These claims come from the scholarly publications listed above.

rationalism; (3) It will analyze the claim that Henry is a classic (e.g., Cartesian) foundationalist; and (4) It will analyze the charges leveled against Henry's cognitive-propositionalism.

Faith and Reason

Norman L. Geisler and Paul Feinberg in their book titled, *Introduction to Philosophy*, explain rationalism and how it interacts with different views of faith and reason.[45] In their chapter titled, "The Relationship Between Faith and Reason," They offer five different solutions to the debate on the relationship between faith and reason.[46] Geisler and Feinberg note, "The solutions to the issue of which method

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[45] Geisler and Feinberg claim, "At the heart of rationalism is the contention that the sources and justification of our beliefs is to be found in reason alone. The rationalist attempt to arrive at apodictic (incontestable) first truths or principles." See Norman L. Geisler and Paul Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 110, Italics in original.

[46] They claim, "'Revelation' is a supernatural disclosure by God of truth which could not be discovered by the unaided powers of human reason. 'Reason' is the natural ability of the human mind to discover truth." Ibid., 255.

is a reliable source of truth are divisible into five basic categories: (1) revelation only; (2) reason only; (3) reason over revelation; (4) revelation over reason; and (5) revelation and reason."[47] These five solutions offer a paradigm to explain the relationship of rationalism and varying views of faith and reason.

One possible objection against the researcher's proposed method for defending Henry against the charge that he is a rationalist is Henry does not use Geisler and Feinberg's categories of faith and reason. While it is true Henry never *explicitly* utilizes Geisler and Feinberg's five categories to discuss faith and reason, however, a thorough reading of his books (especially *Toward a Recovery*), indicate that Henry does employ *similar* categories to discuss and analyze faith and reason.[48] That being said, the

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Carl F. H. Henry, *Toward A Recovery of Christian Belief* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990). For example: (1) **Revelation only**, Henry claims, "More properly labeled as fideists are Soren Kirkegaard

following section is going to: (1) Briefly allow Geisler and

Feinberg to explain these five categories of faith and

reason; and (2) Use Geisler and Feinberg's categories of

faith and reason to show that Henry does not affirm a

rationalist method or rationalist view of faith and reason;

instead, he is Augustinian in his method and approach to

faith and reason.

Geisler and Feinberg list Sören Kierkegaard as the

main advocate of the "**revelation only**" approach. They

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and certain Neo-orthodox theologians who dismiss public reason and rational tests as irrelevant to religious truth claims." (Ibid., 39); (2) **Reason only**, Henry claims, "The negative impulse of the Enlightenment aimed to promote human reason by stifling supernatural revelation" (Ibid., 70). (3) **Reason over revelation**, Henry claims, "But the Enlightenment managed to suffocate both reason and revelation, instead of recognizing that reason is the alley and not the enemy of divine revelation" (Ibid.); (4) **Revelation over reason**, Henry claims, ". . . but equally much with the so-called Tertullian formula *credo quia absurdum* ('I believe what is absurd'). The modern Neo-orthodox revival of Tertullian's slogan was not unrelated to existentialist insistence on the ultimate absurdity of the world, a notion that is neither biblical nor evangelical." (Ibid., 40, Italics in original); (5) **Revelation and reason**, Henry claims," One must contrast the Augustinian formula *credo ut intellegam* ('I believe in order to understand') not only with Thomas Aquinas's formula ('I understand in order to believe') . . ." (Ibid., Italics in original).

claim, "According to Sören Kierkegaard (1813–1855), the father of modern existentialism, the human is wholly incapable of discovering any divine truth." [49] Karl Barth is the second example of the "revelation only" approach, who like Kierkegaard, argues that God is "Wholly Other" and can be known only by divine revelation.[50] The second view they list is the "**reason only**" approach. They list Immanuel Kant and Benedict Spinoza as the main advocates of this view. These two philosophers did not believe that anything about God was known by revelation; instead, only reason is the final test for religious truth. Geisler and Feinberg note that Kant went so far as to claim agnosticism about the knowledge of God. Geisler and Feinberg list the Alexandrian Fathers and Modern Higher Criticism as advocates of the "**reason over revelation**" approach. For example, they claim, "Justin Martyr believed in divine

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[49] Geisler and Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 256.
[50] Ibid., 258.

revelation, but in addition to the Bible he held that 'reason is implanted in every race of man.' In view of this he held that those among the ancient Greeks who 'lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists.' This included men such as Heraclitus and Socrates."[51]

The fourth view is the "**revelation over reason**" approach. They list Tertullian and Cornelius Van Til as the two main advocates of this method.[52] Geisler and Feinberg claim,

> Perhaps the best example among contemporary evangelical thinkers of one who exalts revelation over reason is the Reformed theologian and apologist, Cornelius Van Til (b. 1895). His view is often called *presuppositionalism* because it strongly stresses the need to 'presuppose' the truth of revelation in order for reason to function. For if there were no God—who created and sustains the very laws and processes of reason, then thinking itself would be impossible. Reason, for Van Til, is

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[51] Ibid., 261.
[52] Ibid., 262–263.

radically and actually dependent on revelation.[53]

The final view Geisler and Feinberg list is the "**revelation and reason**" approach. They claim Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas are the main advocates of this method. Geisler and Feinberg note that Augustine attempts to reason about, within, and for revelation; but never against it.[54]

With these categories in place, it helps to set the stage for a discussion of the charge that Henry is a

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[53] Ibid., 263., Italics in original.

[54] Ibid., 265. Geisler and Feinberg explain Augustine's two steps in his approach to faith and reason. First, "*Faith is understanding's step.*" Ibid., 265. They claim, "Without faith one would never come to a full understanding of God's truth. Faith initiates one into knowledge. In this sense, Augustine fully believed that faith in God's revelation is prior to human reason. On the other hand, Augustine also held that no one ever believes something before he has some understanding of what it is he is to believe." Ibid. Since Augustine believed that faith is prior to reason, Geisler and Feinberg label his view as "revelation *and* reason." Ibid., Italics in original. Second, "*Understanding is faith's reward.*" Ibid. They claim, "The reward for accepting God's revelation by faith is that one has a fuller and more complete understanding of truth than he could have otherwise." Ibid., Italics in original. For example, Augustine argues for the existence of God that starts from the minds knowledge of immutable truths to an Immutable God.[54] In brief, for Augustine, faith is a prerequisite to have a full understanding of God's revelation; however, human reason and revelation operate in accordance with one another.

rationalist. It seems like the charges labeled against Henry

claim he is advocating for either the "reason only" or

"reason over revelation" approaches. However, there is no

warrant for this claim in any of Henry's writings.[55]

Moreover, just because Henry labels himself as a

presuppositionalist and argues for a deductive method, does

not entail that he is a rationalist. It should be noted that in

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[55] Geisler and Feinberg note that a rationalist approach seeks justification in reason alone. Methodologically, rationalists operate from a certain starting point and deduce all other truths about reality. Furthermore, in the five different views of faith and reason, it is becomes apparent that the "reason only" and "reason over revelation" approaches were the only two that seem to meet the rationalist definition and methodological criteria. These approaches either downplayed or degraded the role of revelation in light of the authority of reason. The "revelation over reason" approach of Cornelius Van Til seems to operate according rationalist methodology, in that it allows for a certain starting point, and it allows for a deductive method. However, it does not meet the rationalist definition because it does not claim that reason is superior or degrades revelation; instead, revelation is superior and even degrades fallen human reason. The "revelation and reason" approach still allows for certain starting points and a deductive method. It allows for humanity to base their knowledge as the starting point of revelation and in rational categories. Human thinking is able to make inferences to the nature of God, and deductions from the nature of truth to the existence of God. However, reason does not trump revelation, and revelation does not override reason. Geisler and Feinberg suggest, "'Revelation and reason' . . . properly assigns a role to each and shows their interrelationship. One should reason about and for revelation, otherwise he has an unreasonable faith. Likewise, reason has no guide without a revelation and flounders in error." Ibid., 270.

chapter two on Henry's epistemology the second principle of his approach is, "Human reason is a divinely fashioned instrument for recognizing truth; it is not a creative source for truth."[56] Rationalist approaches on the other hand argue that reason is the creative source for truth, even determining the validity of divine revelation.[57] Henry dismisses the claim that an appeal to rationale and use of the laws of logic is a form of rationalistic philosophy.[58] He criticizes rationalism, claiming, "What is objectionable about rationalism is not reason, however, but human reasoning deployed into the service of premises that flow from arbitrary and mistaken postulations about reality and truth."[59]

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[56] Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (6 vols.; Waco: Word Books, 1976–1983), 2:223. He emphatically favors the necessity of rationale within a Christian worldview. Henry's insists on rationale to the point in which he claims, "The Christian faith emphasizes that one has nothing to gain and everything to lose by opposing or downgrading rationality." Ibid., 2:225

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 2:226.

[59] Ibid.

Henry neither resembles the definition of the rationalist method, nor does his method come to the same conclusions of Kant and Spinoza or the Alexandrian Fathers and Higher Critics (e.g., the two examples listed by Geisler and Feinberg of the "reason only" and "reason over revelation" approaches).[60] Henry's method may utilize a deductive approach; however, it is grounded within a revelational theistic framework, in which the two axioms are the existence of God and the Bible as the starting points of all theology. If anything, Henry's method has a different starting point in that it does not allow for reason to override revelation, however, it does not allow for revelation to override reason. Instead, his method argues for the compatibility of faith and reason. In the end, much like his epistemological forefather in the faith; Henry, like Augustine, develops a method in which faith utilizes and

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[60] Ibid.

harmoniously employs reason, not one in which reason is

the creative source for all truth.

Rationalism and Augustinianism

G. Wright Doyle has an entire chapter in his book

responding to the charge that Henry is a rationalist.[61] He

alludes to M. J. Ovey, who claims that "rationalism" still

carries many negative overtones in many communities.

Doyle distinguishes between rationalism and a commitment

to being rational, with the latter being the process of

providing reasons for ones beliefs and a commitment to the

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[61] He cites C. Stephen Evans, who claims, "Rationalism has been defined as a 'conviction that reason provides the best or even the only path to truth. . . . In theology the term rationalism often designates a position that subordinates revelation to human reason or rules out revelation as a source of knowledge altogether.'" G. Wright Doyle, *Carl Henry Theologian for All Seasons: An Introduction and Guide to Carl Henry's God, Revelation, and Authority* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2010), 107. See Stephen C. Evans, "Approaches to Christian Apologetics," in *new Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (eds. W. C. Campbell-Jack and Gavin J. McGrath; Downers Grove: InterVaristy, 2006), 98–99.

validity of the laws of logic.[62] He suggests some scholars understand rationalism to be a view claiming that human reason is the supreme and only means of arriving at truth, divine truth included. Furthermore, they understand rationalism to be a sterile, passionless, anti-supernatural method, contrary to Christian theism and the Bible as divine revelation.[63] Doyle claims, "When Henry's opponents brand his theological method as 'rationalism,' they score a rhetorical victory without really having to substantiate their charge."[64] He believes if Henry's critics can merely associate his approach with a "rationalist" method, they have already won the rhetorical battle. Doyle offers three reasons why Henry is not a rationalist:

> *1. Carl Henry's thought does not fit in any sense the standard definitions of rationalism given above.* That is, he does not believe that reason alone can ascertain ultimate truth; he does not give reason priority over God's revelation in the Bible; he does not believe

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[62] Doyle, *Carl Henry*, 108.
[63] Ibid., 108–109.
[64] Ibid., 109.

> that rational evidence alone will persuade
> anyone to believe in Christ. . . . *2. Some of the*
> *charges of a sort of 'Christian rationalism'*
> *leveled against Henry by fellow Christians*
> *seem to be based either on ignorance of*
> *misunderstanding.* Even a cursory reading of
> *God, Revelation, and Authority* will show
> they lack foundation. *3. It seems to me that*
> *accusations that Henry is a 'rationalist'*
> *sometimes proceed from premises that are*
> *false or internally contradictory.*[65]

Doyle goes on to explain his second objection by appealing

to the fact that in Henry's section titled, "Four Ways of

Knowing," he critiques the rationalist method. Henry's

criticism of the rationalist method is not to say that he did

not validate a *type* of rational intuition. Doyle explains,

> Still, there is a kind of 'rational intuitionism'
> held by Augustine, Calvin, and others,
> including Henry, which believes that 'human
> beings know certain propositions
> immediately to be true, without resort to
> inference.' These would include the
> existence of God and the sense of right and
> wrong, the awareness of self, the laws of
> logic, and truths of mathematics. According
> to this view, the categories of thought are

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[65] Ibid., 109–110, Italics in original.

aptitudes for thought implanted by the Creator and synchronized with the whole of created reality.[66]

Doyle is correct when he insists that Henry's method is not derived from modern rationalism; instead, Revelational Theism finds its origin in Augustine's theory of knowledge. Doyle stresses that Henry's method is not a rationalistic approach because human reasoning is not the only reliable and valid source of knowledge. Revelation is the only reliable and valid source of knowledge, and human reason is fashioned to recognize God's revelation.[67]

Chapter two of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* discusses *how* Henry argues for a Revelational Theistic

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[66] Ibid., 111.

[67] Henry's revelational theistic epistemology insists that the Logos of God is both the creator and sustainer of reality. The Logos is both the salvific and epistemological mediator, who reveals Himself in creation and in Scripture. Doyle claims that Henry utilizes a deductive method; however, the purpose is to demonstrate that humanity is able to make legitimate inferences. The starting point of theology is the Bible, not human reason. Our knowledge of God does not arise from human speculation, but from divinely revealed truths. Finally, Doyle notes that Henry recognizes the necessity of the Holy Spirit to illumine the mind of believers, enabling them to understand and believe what they have learned.[67] In these respects, Doyle is correct in his assessment that Henry is not a rationalist. Instead, Henry, like Augustine and Calvin, utilizes reason in accordance with revelation.

epistemology (e.g., Augustinian) by incorporating its views

of reason and revelation. Furthermore, it notes where Henry

argues against rationalism; however, a few points need to

be made to distinguish Henry's epistemology from

rationalism. First, Henry makes a distinction between the

use of reason and rationalism. According to Henry, reason

simply refers to ". . . man's intellect, mind or cognitive

powers."[68] Furthermore, when discussing the relationship

between reason and revelation, he claims,

> Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the
> truth of Christianity included; reason is the
> instrument for recognizing it; Scripture is its
> verifying principle; logical consistency is a
> negative test for truth and coherence a
> subordinate test. The task of Christian
> theology is to exhibit the content of biblical
> revelation as an orderly whole.[69]

In this quote, Henry makes the distinction between, "Divine

revelation is the source of **all** truth" and "reason is the

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[68] Ibid., 1:225–226.
[69] Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:215.

instrument for **recognizing** it [truth]." This distinction between the source of truth and the instrument for recognizing truth distinguishes Henry from rationalism.[70] Furthermore, Henry notes that this distinction between revelation and his use of reason distinguishes Revelational Theism from rationalism. He claims, "The rationalistic approach subordinates the truth of revelation to its own alternatives and has speculated itself into exhaustion. If we are again to speak confidently of metaphysical realities, the critically decisive issue is on what basis—human postulation or divine revelation?"[71] In brief, Henry favors Revelational Theism (e.g., Augustinianism) over and above rationalism.

The following quote by Henry illustrates *why* he favors a revelational approach. Henry claims, "The revelational alternative can lift the philosophical enterprise

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 1:95.

once again above theories that are essentially irrational, and can restore reason to indispensable importance, without abetting rationalism; it can overcome the current addition to the nonobjectivity of knowledge. . ."[72] Considering these types of comments from Henry, it is evident he favors a revelational approach to epistemology because it grounds knowledge in God (e.g., ontological axiom) and Scripture (e.g., epistemological axiom), over and against speculative philosophical approaches grounded in the non-God (e.g., their ontological axiom) and the postulations of human reason (e.g., their epistemological axiom).

A second distinction between Henry's method and rationalism is found in volume one, chapter four of *God, Revelation and Authority* titled, "The Ways of Knowing."[73] There he correlates rationalism with Descartes and criticizes the rationalist (e.g., Cartesian) method. However,

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[72] Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:95.
[73] Ibid., 1:70–95.

in chapter nineteen Henry includes a chapter titled "The

Philosophical Transcendent A Priori (II)." In that chapter,

Henry offers some of his most explicit criticisms of

rationalism, especially Cartesian rationalism, which are: (1)

Rationalism offers a wholly philosophical approach to

epistemology (whereas Henry believed in a revelational

approach to epistemology);[74] (2) Rationalism falsely makes

human reason the starting point for epistemic investigation

(whereas Henry made God, his ontological axiom, and the

Bible, his epistemological axiom, the starting points for

epistemic investigation);[75] (3) Henry distinguishes

Descartes view from Augustine's. Henry claims,

> Augustine had not only recognized God as
> the source of all being and true knowledge,
> but viewed all knowledge also as in some
> sense the revelation of the one ultimate Spirit
> to created spirits. Descartes's philosophy
> develops quite out of touch with this
> revelational setting. As speculative, his near-
> pantheistic schema is, of course, projected as

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[74] Ibid., 1:302.
[75] Ibid.

an alternative to the revelational theism which Christianity grounds in principle of supernatural disclosure. In Descartes's approach, with its emphasis on human initiative, one finds little to suggest any direct interest in divine revelation, whether particular or universal.[76]

In summary, the research indicates that Henry distinguishes his Revelational Theistic epistemology from rationalism; however, contrary to the claims of his critics, Henry's distinction is not a distinction without a difference.

The differences between Henry's epistemology and rationalism boil down to differences on the following points: (a) the definition of reason and the relationship between reason and revelation; (b) the primacy of revelation in the epistemological process; (c) the priority of the divine vs. the human initiative in the knowing process. The final reason Henry should not be considered a rationalist is because according to his own self-testimony he claims to follow a form of Revelational Theism in the

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[76] Ibid., 1:303.

Augustinian tradition, not a version of Cartesian

rationalism.

<center>Foundationalism</center>

The second charge against Henry's epistemology claims his

method endorses a version of strong foundationalism.[77] In

particular, this section is going to use Chad Brand's article

titled, *Is Carl Henry a Modernist?*, in order to analyze and

respond to the claim that Henry is a strong

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[77] Robert Audi claims, "A strong foundationalist theory of justification might hold that indirectly justified beliefs derive *all* their justification from foundational beliefs; a moderate theory might maintain only that the former would not be justified apart from the latter, and the theory might grant that other factors, such as coherence of belief with others one holds that are *not* in the chain, can add to its justification." Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd ed (New York: Routledge, 2011), 216.

foundationalist.[78] The analysis of Brand's article will address: (1) Brand's distinction between strong (e.g., classic) foundationalism and soft (e.g., fallibilist) foundationalism; and (2) Brand's claim that Henry affirms a form of soft (e.g., fallibilist) foundationalism to overcome the charge that Henry is a strong (e.g., classic) foundationalist.[79]

Brand addresses the question, "Is Henry a foundationalist?" by claiming, "If one means by 'foundationalist,' the search for Cartesian certainty through the discovery of indubitable and noninferential truth claims arrived at through reason or reflection, then the answer is a resounding, 'no.'"[80] Brand goes on to claim,

> It might be correct, on the other hand, to call Henry a scriptural foundationalist, a term used by Nancey Murphy in her discussion of Donald Bloesch. Henry is clearly a biblical

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[78] Chad Owen Brand, "Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Post-War Evangelical Theology," SBJT 8/4, winter (2004), 44–60.

[79] Ibid., 52–53.

[80] Ibid., 52.

> foundationlist in that his entire edifice is founded upon a rock-ribbed conviction that the Bible is to be trusted, while all philosophical systems are suspect, even Platonism, Aristotelianism and, certainly, Cartesianism.[81]

Brand admits he pushes the description of Henry's foundationalism a bit further to include the notion of "biblical foundationalism."[82] The reason he labels Henry a "biblical foundationalist," is because Brand believes Henry must affirm a form of foundationalism in order to preserve his commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture and adherence to the law of non-contradiction.[83] Still, even by labeling Henry a "biblical foundationalist," Brand believes this label distinguishes Henry from the charges he is a "strong foundationalist."

In order to maintain the claim that Henry is not a strong foundationalist, Brand appeals to Robert Audi and

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[81] Ibid., 52–53.
[82] Ibid., 53.
[83] Ibid.

makes the following point. He writes, "Robert Audi has recently argued that foundationalism is not the great Satan of contemporary thought, but rather, that a certain form of foundationalism is virtually required of anyone who does not wish to fall into pure subjectivism and relativism."[84] Brand goes on to say, "A commitment to foundationalism, then does not necessarily imply a commitment to indubitable and noninferential truths. There is, for instance, such a thing as fallibilist foundationalism."[85] At this point, Brand seems to claim there are at least three types of foundationalism: (1) strong foundationalism; (2) fallibilist foundationalism; and (3) biblical foundationalism. Apparently Brand believes by making these kinds of distinctions between these three views, he can overcome the charge that Henry is a strong foundationalist.

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[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

Brand believes these types of distinctions are able to free Henry's epistemology from the charges that it is a version of strong foundationalism because: (a) there are different types of foundationalism; and (b) it is a rhetorical device to label Henry as a foundationalist (insisting that he is a strong foundationalist) because of the negative overtones associated with strong foundationalism.[86] With these two points in mind, Brand suggests that contemporary scholars should not oppose of all types of foundationalism; instead, they should only oppose Cartesian foundationalism because of its criterion for indubitable and noninferrential truths. He also believes soft foundationalism (or as he labels it "fallibilist foundationalism") is able to overcome the charges to strong (e.g., Cartesian) foundationalism. With these distinctions in place, Brand claims,

> While Henry certainly believes the truths of
> Scripture are indubitable, he recognizes that
> human knowledge is always subject to error

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[86] Ibid.

> and revision. In regards to Scripture, Henry is certainly a firm, biblical foundationalist; in regards to the outworking of the theological implications of biblical asseverations, it appears that Henry is a soft foundationalist, one who is willing to admit that all our claims to understand are subject to the eternal bar of God's judgment.[87]

With Brand's categories clearly laid out on the table, a few comments in response to his points are necessary in order to continue the dialogues about Henry's epistemology.

First, Brand correctly notes that Henry opposes rationalism, especially Cartesian rationalism. In that sense, Brand and Doyle seem to be in agreement over their assessment of Henry's approach to rationalism. However, one of the difficulties with Brand's assessment is that he discusses Henry's epistemology in categories Henry never explicitly used. One would be hard pressed to find in any of Henry's literature a discussion on the distinctions between different types of foundationalism (e.g., strong, soft,

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[87] Ibid.

fallibilist, biblical and so forth). The present researcher
believes one reason is because classic evangelicalism
seems to discuss theories of knowledge in different
categories than contemporary forms of evangelicalism. For
that reason, there are times when classic evangelicals and
present-day evangelicals are sometimes two ships passing
in the night. For example, classical evangelicals seem to
use the terms relativism and subjectivism interchangeably;
whereas some present-day evangelical approaches make a
distinction between them. In addition, many present-day
evangelicals seem to have different categories for
discussing epistemology (e.g., strong foundationalism, soft
foundationalism, and so forth), than classic evangelicals.[88]

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[88] This comment on the different categories for discussing
epistemology and the language used in that conversation could be a
book in and of itself. The justification comes from personal experience
and observation. In my experience, in my experience many classic
evangelicals (e.g., Norman L. Geisler, Carl F. H. Henry, R. C. Sproul,
J. I. Packer) use a historical approach to epistemology. For example,
they study Augustinianism, Thomism, Hume, and Kantianism as such;
however, they do not discuss these figures in terms of foundationalism,
warrant, justification and so forth. Whereas many present-day

Nonetheless, just because Henry does not utilize the same language and categories of thought does not mean Brand and subsequent philosophers cannot place Henry into these epistemic categories.[89] In fact, the distinction Brand makes between strong (e.g., Cartesian) and soft (e.g., fallibilist) foundationalism rightly captures one aspect of Henry's epistemology *per se* and hermeneutic as epistemology. This is because Henry claims human knowledge is subject to error and revision; however, unlike subjectivist approaches to knowledge, he does not believe subjectivity undermines the objective nature of divine revelation or the universal laws of logic.[90] That being said, Brand's distinction between strong and soft foundationalist

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evangelicals will read those same figures, but use different categories and language in their conversations.

[89] In fact, in many respects academic disciplines attempt to explain previous theories through the lenses of present day approaches, categories, and methods.

[90] This claim will be further discussed in chapter six of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* on Henry's analysis of critical realism. In particular, it will discuss Henry's analysis of Bernard Lonergan and Alister McGrath's use of critical realism and theological method.

is a category used by contemporary epistemologists and it seems to rightly vindicate Henry from the charge of being a strong foundationalist. In that respect, Henry's epistemology is markedly different than strong foundationalist epistemologies because his epistemology, like that of soft foundationalism, includes criteria to account for error and revision (unlike strong foundationalism).

The second distinction Brand makes is one between strong foundationalism and biblical foundationalism.[91] While Brand does not offer an explicit definition of the term "biblical foundationalism," he does suggest it entails that the Bible is to be trusted over and above all philosophical systems. Brand's labeling of Henry as a "biblical foundationalist," while not a term used by Henry about his own method, seems to grasp one of the key points of Henry's epistemology; namely, his belief that the Bible

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[91] Ibid.

is the epistemological axiom for all knowledge. This entails: (a) epistemologists should not allow nonbiblical (e.g., alien categories) categories to frame the conversations and categories of epistemological dialogues and conclusions; (b) epistemologists should use the Bible to frame the conversations and categories of epistemological dialogue and conclusions; (c) all theological doctrine should find their origin in Scripture, not in the non-God (e.g., ontological axioms contrary to Christian theism) or in speculative human reason (e.g., non-biblical theories of knowledge or secular epistemological axioms).[92]

In the final analysis, the present researcher believes Brand's distinction between strong foundationalism and soft foundationalism (e.g., fallibilist foundationalism), seems to be a good way to distinguish Henry's epistemology from the charge that he is a strong foundationalist. In Brand's opinion, the key distinction is

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[92] See chapter two of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology*.

that strong foundationalism requires indubitability and certainty, whereas Henry's epistemology allows for fallibility and error. The second thing to notice is Brand's analysis rightly captures the fact that Henry is a type of foundationalist, namely a soft foundationalist and biblical foundationalist. Henry believes there are certain unproven truths that ground other truths claims, and that valid inferences from those foundational truth claims provide certain conclusions; however, those truths find their origin in Scripture, not speculative human reason. In these respects and with Brand's categories in place, Brand's distinctions seem to provide a way to overcome the charges made by Grenz, Franke, and McGrath that Henry is foundationalist (e.g., strong foundationalist).

Cognitive-Propositionalism

After considering the works of Vanhoozer, three characteristics can be identified to summarize his criticisms

of Henry's view of language. First, Vanhoozer suggests that Henry's method resembles Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning. He believes the failure of referential approaches to meaning is that language does more than refer. Second, Vanhoozer claims Henry's approach downplays or diminishes the various genres of Scripture. Third, Vanhoozer believes Henry's epistemology and religious language cannot account for the different *types* of truth. Each of these criticisms have been addressed in chapters two and three of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology*. However, a few comments will suffice to indicate *why* Vanhoozer's charges are actually misrepresentations of Henry's hermeneutic as epistemology and methodology.

Vanhoozer's first criticism is that Henry's philosophy of language resembles referential theories of meaning. However, Vanhoozer appears to misunderstand the nature of truth as correspondence to reality. He seems to have been misled by Wittgenstein's criticism that

correspondence is the "picture" theory wherein a statement

corresponds to the facts if it mirrors them. But this is not

what "correspondence" means. Correspondence means a

statement (or expression) must *match* reality, not

necessarily *mirror* it. It must correctly *reflect* reality, but

not necessarily *resemble* it. It must properly *represent*

reality, not *reproduce* it. A statement corresponds to reality

when it correctly signifies, conforms to, or agrees with

reality, not when it is a mirror image of it.[93]

Vanhoozer's second criticism is that Henry's

cognitive-propositional method downplays or diminishes

the various genres of Scripture is inaccurate. Thornbury

claims, "As is the case with other figures in the critical

reception of Henry, Vanhoozer reads Henry in the worst

possible light, namely, that Henry claims no more than one

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[93] See Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 139.

way to read a text of Scripture."[94] Paul Helm also

recognizes that Vanhoozer has characterized and

misrepresented the H-H hypothesis on genre and

propositional truth.[95] Henry's emphasis on propositional

revelation should not be seen as downgrading or diluting

the various genres of Scripture. In chapter three of the

Hermeneutics as Epistemology, Henry is quoted saying,

> By its emphasis that divine revelation is
> propositional, Christian theology in no way
> denies that the Bible conveys its message in
> many literary forms such as letters, poetry
> and parable, prophecy and history. What it
> stresses, rather, is that the truth conveyed by
> God through these various forms has
> conceptual adequacy, and that in all cases the
> literary teaching is part of a divinely inspired
> message that conveys the truth of divine
> revelation. Propositional disclosure is not
> limited to nor does it require only one
> particular literary genre. And of course the
> expression of truth in other forms than the

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[94] Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism*, 103.
[95] See Paul Helm, "Vanhoozer's Remythologizing Theology," Helm's Deep, entry posted May 1, 2010, http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/search?.q=Remythologizing+Theology.

customary prose does not preclude expressing that truth in declarative propositions.[96]

A straight forward reading of Henry's *God, Revelation, and Authority* reveals he affirms the Bible's various uses of genre. One of the key points of difference between Henry and Vanhoozer centers on the nature and purpose of genre. Vanhoozer believes that propositional theology downplays the Bible's various genres. Whereas, Henry believes propositional theology affirms the Bible's various genres. Vanhoozer appears to suggest that genre determines meaning. In this sense, genre criticism operates as the best way to understand the *way* the various writers of Scripture are communicating the different *types* of truth. Henry, on the other hand, claims genre does not determine meaning; instead, it enhances meaning and magnifies truth.

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[96] Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:463.

Vanhoozer's third charge is Henry's view of epistemology and religious language cannot account for the different *types* of truth. Chapter two of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* demonstrates that for Henry, because all of humanity equally bears the image of God, each individual has the same rational faculties. The continuity of rationale in humanity entails there are not different *types* of truth. There is only *one* truth and logic in all of humanity. Chapter three of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* establishes how Henry taught that the plurality of genres in Scripture are each capable of grasping and communicating this *one* truth in a *variety* of literary forms.[97] Just like different cultures throughout the world do not create different minds,

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[97] This aspect of Henry's language theory was explained in chapter three of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* under the sections titled, "The Logic of Religious Language," "Linguistic Analysis and Propositional Truth," and "The Bible as Propositional Revelation."

so too, the different genres of Scripture do not create different kinds of rationale and truth.[98]

As chapter two of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* argues, Henry affirms a correspondence view of truth (e.g., where correspondence takes ontological priority over a coherence test for truth; however, coherence is a subtest for truth).[99] All views of truth have an inherent correspondence to reality, because the proponents believe their view corresponds to reality.[100] Most basic of all is the fact that the correspondence view of truth is literally undeniable for the very denial of it purports to correspond to reality. Without a correspondence view of truth, there is no basis for knowing an error (e.g., there is nothing in reality to which the claim must be made to correspond). Almost anything could be true if one starts redefining the nature of

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[98] See the section in chapter of three in *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* titled, "The Bible as Propositional Revelation." Also, the section in chapter four titled, "The Grammatical-Historical Method of Interpretation."

[99] See chapter two of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology*.

[100] Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 139.

truth claiming there are different *types* of truth (e.g.,

personal vs. correspondence). It is a misnomer to speak of

"relational" or "personal" truth. There are truths about

relationships and truths about persons in Scripture, but truth

itself is not relational or personal. Truth is propositional,

that is, it makes a statement that affirms or denies

something about reality. Norman Geisler and I our book

Defending Inerrancy claim,

> . . . Vanhoozer's own description [of
> epistemology and propositional revelation]
> admits, he is diminishing much of the history
> of Christianity from the first century to our
> time. Even he acknowledges that 'for large
> swaths of the Western tradition, the task of
> theology consisted in mining propositional
> nuggets from the biblical deposit of truth'
> (LI? 94). He admits that the roots of this go
> back to the New Testament where 'the
> Pauline shaft in particular was thought to
> contain several rich doctrinal lodes' (94). He
> also correctly observes that this carried into
> the Middle Ages. He wrote: 'According to
> Thomas Aquinas, Scripture contains the
> science of God: the unified teaching from
> God about God. . . . doctrine is essentially
> sacred teaching, a divinely revealed

informative proposition about an objective reality' (94). Following this, in '19ᵗʰ-century Princeton, A. A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield laid the groundwork for conservative evangelical theology by insisting on the importance of propositional truth' (94). In short, Vanhoozer's view is against the mainstream of Christianity for the last two thousand years![101]

Henry defends the traditional view of truth through

his revelational hermeneutic. The Bible calls for

Christians to use reason (Isa. 1:18: 1 Pet. 3:15).

Indeed, the use of the mind is part of the great

commandment, which includes loving God with

both the "mind" as well as the "heart" (Matt.

22:37). Surely Vanhoozer does not want to remove

the laws of logic from the task of thinking. The

apostle Paul admonishes for Christians to "avoid . . .

contradictions" (1 Tim. 6:20). Even the

Westminster Confession of Faith (which is a classic

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[101] Ibid., 141.

confession in Vanhoozer's Reformed tradition)

encourages the use of logic in theology and speaks

of "the whole counsel of God . . . either expressly

set down in Scripture, *or by good and necessary*

consequence may be deduced from Scripture."[102]

Using logic to deduce truths from Scripture (which

is the basis of these truths) is not basing truths on

logic. Logic is only the rational instrument (coming

from a rational God and inherent in the rational

creatures made in His image) that enables humanity

to discover certain truths that are implied in

Scripture.

Conclusion

The research from this article indicates that the claim

"Henry is a rationalist" is misguided because he neither

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[102] Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes* (3 vols.: Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 3:603, Emphasis added.

meets the standard definition of a rationalist nor does he

employ a rationalist method. Instead, Henry affirms an

Augustinian epistemology and presuppositional

methodology. Furthermore, the charges by Kevin

Vanhoozer are a misrepresentation of Henry's actual

position. He does not meet the criterion for affirming early

Wittgenstein's theory of referential meaning. Moreover,

instead of diminishing the Bible's various genres, Henry

affirms that each one of them is important and essential for

a proper exegesis of Scripture. And lastly, Henry believes

there is a single type of truth given by God which is

displayed in both general and special revelation.